

Personal Pronouns in ‘About Us’ Section of Online University Prospectus

Zakia Bano (Correspondence author)

Department of English & Applied Linguistics, Government College University, Faisalabad, Pakistan

E-mail: zakia_bano@ymail.com

Aleem Shakir

Department of English & Applied Linguistics, Government College University Faisalabad, Pakistan

E-mail: almsha@yahoo.com

Abstract

The university prospectus is supposed to be a forceful and pioneering text in promoting and marketing higher education. The present research will deal with the disparities in the frequencies of first and second person pronouns in online prospectuses in cross-cultural linguistics from marketing point of view. The research question is to which extent the frequencies of first and second person pronouns in ‘About Us’ section of online prospectuses are contradictory in cross culture and promotional dimensions. This study is based on the data raked from the ‘About Us’ section of online university prospectuses in 463 culturally distinct institutional contexts of Australia, India, Pakistan, the United Kingdom and the United States of America. The categories of the first person I, we, and the second person you, your were analyzed through multidimensional analysis tagger. The analysis showed that the frequencies of first person pronouns were the highest in all the five countries. On the other hand variations in the occurrence of first and second person pronouns were eminent in 5 countries in the ‘About Us’ section. This research is expected to be useful for the universities and international educational organizations to generate better promotional texts in the marketization of higher education for cross-cultural perspective.

Keywords: Online prospectus, ‘About Us’ section, personal pronouns, promotional register, multidimensional analysis tagger, higher education marketing

1. Introduction

The globalization of higher education has been greatly organized owing to increasing geographical mobility and the universal infiltration of English as the language of marketing and education. The traditional view that advertising is unsuitable to education has been discarded and universities now advertise their offerings in both printed and electronic media to entice clients. Research into higher education indicates that there has been a global change from marketing to promotional strategy.

The universities publicize prospectuses for every academic session in print and online websites to allow the prospective students to have information about the disciplines and the institution. The purpose of the online prospectus is to notify the functions of the university, in addition to widening the margin of higher education and exert a pull on the students for admission. In the prospectuses students are treated as clients or customers who accomplish the task of enrolment of students and go on persuading them and their parents to carve out a remarkable career in the worlds’ universities. The ‘About Us’ section of prospectus imparts information about the history, benefits of studying in the particular university and information about the institution.

In the past, research was conducted on different sections of prospectuses with regard to marketisation of higher education and a promotional tool. Fairclough (1993, & 1995) and Peppiatt’s (2007) worked on university prospectus as a promotional literature. Askehave (2007) investigated the marketisation of higher education from the CDA perspective. Osman’s (2008) studies involve a genre analysis. Bhatia (2002) worked on commercial brochures and found intercultural variations in generic realizations, especially in the use of lexicogrammatical and discourse organizational patterns. Khan and Qureshi (2010) describe prospectuses in the context of marketing as a means of communication. Hui (2009) worked on personal pronouns in university prospectus in the context of promotional literature.

The present study thrashes out whether grammatical use of first and second person pronouns in the ‘About Us’ section of university prospectuses language is harmonizing as a promotional linguistic feature. The ‘About Us’ section has remained in vogue as an informational stuff giving the complete general description of the achievements of the university. It goes a long way in facilitating the students to understand the university thoroughly. University uses pronouns in ‘About Us’ section to achieve its goal by persuading the students through the use of inclusive and exclusive language.

The multidimensional analysis tagger was used for data analysis to know the frequencies of the first person pronouns I, we, and second person pronouns you and your. The data of online prospectuses were collected from the universities of five countries and analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively to show how the

promotional language structures of personal pronouns have designed their promotional language structures, individualities and dealings, the universities have made for their future students and the public.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The use of personal pronouns in the marketing language has become a commonplace in the world of advertising. Universities have used pronouns with a view to generating sociability and affability in prospectuses to draw the students for admission. In the marketing of higher education, universities all over the world need to attract the students by using enchanting language. The language aims at (1) endorsing the university, (2) striking interactions, and (3) acclimatizing to the changing needs of the marketing of higher education. The frequencies of personal pronouns are changing as the universities make use of the prospectuses as a promotional literature in the framework of globalized marketing of higher education. The present research is being conducted to know the difference of frequencies and how the universities make selective use of pronouns to draw more and more students in the 'About Us' section of university online prospectuses from Pakistan, India, Australia, Britain and America. how make selective use of pronouns to draw more and more students.

1.3 Research Questions

This study aims at finding answers to the following queries.

How far does the frequency of personal pronouns vary in the 'About Us' section of online prospectuses?
Are there cross-cultural variations in the frequencies of online prospectuses?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Concept of Prospectus

A university prospectus has educational and administrative components. It helps to attract the attention of the reader by generating a promotional language and flaunting the services of the university. It is a supreme public concerning text and it has been an effective tool for the university's advertising. In University prospectus, the 'About Us' section is catering information to the students about the university especially to endorse the vision and goals of the institution. The customary function of the 'About Us' section gives students the purposeful guidelines about the campus, list of brilliant students of the past, history of the university and the city where it is located. Peppiatt (2007) in her research work on the principals' messages professed that the prospectus is an effective mode of discourse as it endues the reader with information about the institution and increases the scope of contest among educational institutions.

The university prospectuses give an indication of the societal cultural values through its language. Teo (2007) opined that a university prospectus is basically an index of the university's programmes and activities, intended to notify to the potential students regarding the university's admission demands and its programmes. A university acclimatizes itself to the changes and demands from marketing and promotional point of view (Osman 2008). Ooi, Ho and Amri (2010) judged university websites to calculate their interests for potential students and inferred that a website is a main maneuver for universities to thrive. Graham (2013) employed a discourse method to scrutinize discursive practices and observed that the high ranking universities have moved towards a more inclusive discourse. Fairclough (1993) used the terms of 'globalisation' and 'marketisation', which turn the universities into businesses rivals to vend their things to customers. She deduces in her research that a number of British universities launched their programmes because they were forced to sell their manufactured items.

Bauer, Dougherty, Goodno, Hatch, Nailos, and Vakilian(2013) probed into the representation of mission statements with regard to the marketing implements. Hui (2009) worked on the introductory pages of university prospectuses in CDA perspective and adopted functional grammar approach. Wu and Fang (2006) probed into university introduction in Australian and Chinese university prospectuses by using systemic functional theory.

Brown and Sen (2010) worked on the prospectus in marketing context focusing on academic libraries. Ciaazzo (2013) went through the lexical structure of the 'About us' branch related with the concept of standard of British and Indian university websites. She admits that a few globalizing tendencies are at present at work in the academic discourse of university websites.

2.2 Prospectus as a Marketing Tool

The report published by UNESCO in 2009 on marketing of higher education, states that universities have always been influenced by worldwide tendencies within a wider international community of academic institutions, scholars, and research (Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley, 2009). Peppiat (2007) supported the promotional planning of institutions because it aimed at learning the use of their marketing tools. The universities fashion an institutional individuality by self-promotional material like prospectuses to produce motivation, procedure and contesting new goods in an open market and draw the customers (Fairclough (1993, 1995). Bhatia (1993) expressed his view that advertisements and brochures are components of promotional

genres as they serve the communicative purpose. Peppiat (2007) observed prospectus as a source of marketing through communication. Hui (2009) labels the universities as advertisers and emphasizes on the importance of advertising discourse to address the masses of students as individuals through inclusive language. Roggendorf (2008) declares that every university makes an effort to raise a specific value and for this purpose prospectuses are an indispensable mode of smattering for latent students.

2.3 Prospectus as a Promotional Text

The use of brochures shows advertisement followed by the use of promotional language. After analyzing multinational corporations' brochures, Askehave and Swales (2001) substantiated that these brochures also serve as the promotional elements to boost the institutions. Swales (1990) in his research thrashed out all the aspects of promotional text and expounded that the purpose of promotional and persuasive text was most often present in abstracts and introductions. They further remarked that the introductions stand for a particular promotional genre. Osman (2008) labeled the commercial brochures in informational text category as institutional promotional diplomacy perspective. She remarks that such informational promotional genres are now frequent in academic background which directly offer information but indirectly carry promotional meanings. She manifested that the distinctive communicative functions of university leaflets are to give information and to encourage a commercial figure of the university. Connell and Galasinski (1998) worked on mission statements and argued that they gratify the requirements of the students as customers. Caiazzo (2013) worked on 'About Us' section of Indian university websites and goes as far as to assert that a promotional strategy excessively pervades in marketization of higher education as revealed by university and corporate websites. Bhatia (1997) affirmed that the 'About Us' sections are often identified by a series of important moves of promotional genres.

2.4 Use of Pronouns

Fairclough (2001) deduces that in the preliminary pages *you* is used to show a harmonious relationship and personal rapport between the university and the students. Fairclough (1993) supports the personalized address of candidates by a singular *you*. Biber (1988) has contended that only the first and second-person pronouns are often used in immensely interactive discourse and the comparative value of the first and second-person pronouns is not always alike. He observes second-person pronouns as a more valuable marker of involvement than the first person pronouns. Biber (2006) argues that *you* is most common in class management, office hours, etc. where it is repeatedly employed for instructions and denotes powerful directives in written course management whereas in topic introducing bundles it invites students' participation.

Hui (2009) holds that the frequent use of *I*, corporate *we* and the singular *you* has been made to mention the university and the students respectively. In his work on university prospectuses he notes that *we* is frequently used for university as the main element presenting programmes or services. He found *us* in more vogue than *we*. He opines that the singular *you* signifies individualised address for potential candidates to show integrity with the reader and is used to maintain a personal connection between the university and the future students in the introductory pages of prospectuses.

Teo (2007) ascertained that the use of the first and second person pronouns creates a closer relationship between the university and the students. Roggendorf (2008) is of the view that personal pronouns infuse a harmony between the university and the reader, recommending that the university and the addressees are equal and acquiesce in important affairs. He is of the opinion that *we* in vice-chancellor's message shows personalized welcome and it also represents the university. He came across the students' life in the introductory section and the text commences by speaking to the reader in person using the personal pronoun *you/your* creating an impression on the reader to react to a hopeful state of mind. He airs his views that the prospectus regards its viewers as if they were individuals who can be seen in the excessive application of the second person pronoun *you*.

In Milne's (2006) view the widespread use of inclusive *we* assumes a function of assistance and recognition with the listeners and develops a public learning surroundings by making common ground and reducing interpersonal remoteness, while *you* attracts students and makes descriptive concepts, and *I* is used for individual skills and responsibilities. Zhu (2006) made a thorough scrutiny of the use of personal pronouns and arrived at the conclusion that *you* and *we* are used to make the language sound warm and friendly to facilitate the advertiser and the reader to make the ads more attractive. In relation to personal pronoun used in the prospectuses, Saichae (2011) states that the textual relationships are depicted usually in the form of personal pronouns, *you* and *we* and the viewer *you* in online prospectuses is the beneficiary of the services and experiences offered by the institution.

3. Methodology

The present research is a corpus-based quantitative and a qualitative one to ascertain university online prospectuses regarding personal pronouns as a promotional feature from marketing and cross-cultural point of

view. The research in hand is concentrated on the evaluation of the first person pronoun I, we and second person pronouns you and your. The comparison of these features of personal pronouns was made to find variations in 'About Us' sections of online prospectuses.

The 'About Us' sections of university online prospectuses of five countries were adopted in this research, in which it was investigated how Australian, Indian, Pakistani, British and American universities liaise their individualities in the Web global framework, by using the personal pronouns in the 'About Us' section of the university websites. The collected texts were put through multidimensional analysis tagger to take the frequencies of first and second person pronouns. The multidimensional analysis tagger gave raw frequencies which were normalized into 1000. To collect the data, all the universities, medical colleges, engineering universities were included in the list. The number of 'About Us' sections found in each country are given in Table 1.

Table1.

| SECTION | AUS | IND | PAK | UK | USA |
|---------|-----|-----|-----|----|-----|
| ABT | 93 | 100 | 83 | 87 | 100 |

Categories Found in "About Us" Sections of Online University Prospectuses

A comparative analysis was carried out to scrutinize how universities in Australia, India, Pakistan, UK and USA make use of personal pronouns similarly or differently to make a range of communicative functions. The highest and the lowest mean scores were drawn. The occurrences of the first and second person pronouns were noted by the use of Antconc. The data were explained both quantitatively and qualitatively. Examples were taken from every country for comparison of the 'About Us' section.

4. Results

The findings demonstrate the use of personal pronoun as a promotional feature in online university prospectuses. The following graph shows the frequencies of the personal pronouns used in different countries.

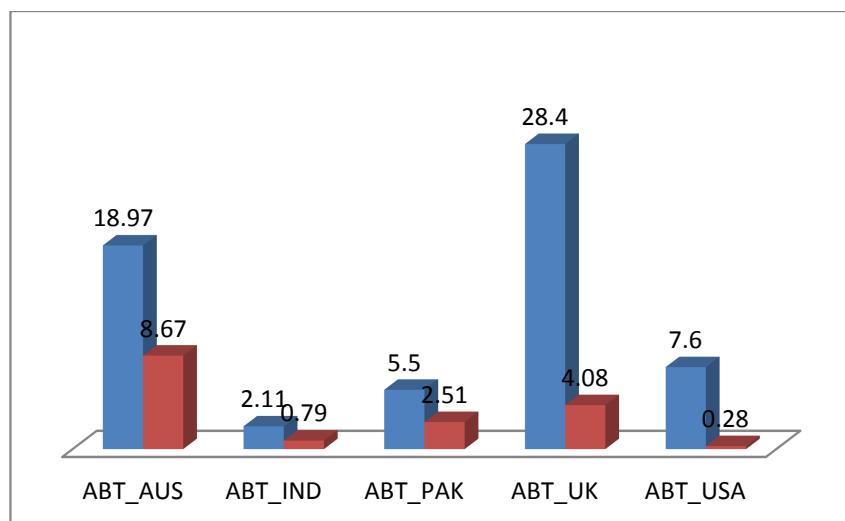


Figure 1. Personal Pronouns in 'About Us' Section

Figure 1: Frequency of the First and the Second Person Pronouns in the 'About Us' Sections of Five Countries Online Prospectuses

The data collected on 'About Us' sections from all the universities showed the vivid differences in the mean scores of the features of first and second person pronouns. In all the 'About Us' sections the highest frequency has been counted in the use of first person pronouns.

Table 2.

| | Australia | India | Pakistan | UK | USA |
|------|-----------|-------|----------|-----|-----|
| I | 3 | 137 | 20 | 2 | 4 |
| We | 229 | 133 | 60 | 299 | 60 |
| You | 211 | 91 | 47 | 185 | 9 |
| Your | 72 | 32 | 20 | 40 | 2 |

Occurrence of Each Feature Online University Prospectuses

In the ‘About Us’ section of university online prospectuses, occurrences were noted with a view to knowing their level of difference. The ‘About Us’ section of Australian university prospectuses contained varied occurrences of first and second person pronouns. There were differences in the occurrence of I, we, you and your. The analysis showed the occurrence of we in the ‘About Us’ sections excessively higher than other features in four countries. In the ‘About Us’ sections of Australian universities, the highest occurrence of we was observed but *you* had also excessive occurrence. But in India the occurrences of both features of first person pronouns have been noted to the maximum. Of them the occurrence of *I* was noted higher than that of *we*. So far as Pakistan is concerned the occurrence of *we* is 60 times while in the UK *we* has appeared 299 times. In the USA online prospectuses *we* has been used more than other features.

4.1 Data Description

A brief account of the use of first person pronouns in the ‘About Us’ sections of Australian, Indian, Pakistani, the UK and the USA online university prospectuses is given below:-

- *We* have a flexible undergraduate degree structure, so that students can build a program with the breadth and depth of study that suits their individual study interests and career needs. *We* can also provide opportunities to engage with education from vocational learning through postdoctoral studies.

All the university ‘About Us’ sections apprise of the university aspects e.g. historical background, university at a glance. In this text from Australian university, the target audiences are students and parents. Inclusive *we* is introduced for the speaker and the audience in ABT sections of Australian universities. In this example the statement “We have a flexible.....” is enough to show that there is a tinge of a firm willpower of the speaker who seems to bring home his cordial feelings to the students. The use of inclusive *we* denotes the speaker who is speaking on behalf of the university. The impression of the first person pronouns is that the speaker has a great power to change everything. The addresser acts as an authority to attract the targeted students for admission. It has a purpose to describe the responsibilities of the university and depicts the importance of the readers by incessantly addressing them in an encouraging tone. The information is interactive and the addresser is addressing a class of students to invite the attention of the students and not a single person.

- We are delighted to declare that our University reigns as the Supreme Star on the Galaxy of Education Institutions, We do not just create sensitive Intellectuals, but mould our students as Complete Men and Women. We instill values of life in them and let them our as Noble Citizens, this makes our University unique.

Indian university prospectuses notify the ‘About Us’ sections by using first person pronouns at the maximum by attracting students and parents. The data depict the high frequency of first person pronouns in the ‘About Us’ section. The Indian prospectuses data mainly show the usage of *we* which often transpires the inclusive personal reference. The pronouns *we* is profusely used in the ‘About Us’ section of Indian prospectuses. The personal pronoun *we* refers to someone not existing as a person but qualifies university. In this text the university has been set on a pedestal in a very coaxing style. The addresser has gone to the extent of comparing the university to ‘Supreme Star’, ‘Galaxy of Education Institutions’ and ‘Sensitive Intellectuals’. In his bid to aggrandize the university, the writer has written first words as capital ‘our University’, ‘Supreme Star’, ‘Galaxy of Education Institutions’, ‘We’, ‘Sensitive Intellectuals’, ‘Mould our students’, ‘Complete Men and Women’ and ‘our as Noble Citizens’. The speaker has done so only from advertising and marketing point of view.

- BUITEMS' quest for academic excellence is based on five fundamental pillars; the students, the faculty, curriculum, the learning environment and the civil society *we* serve. *We* stand resolute resolved that in our academic offering *we* shall not only follow the standards; *we* shall also set new “records of excellence.”

The third text from Pakistani university represents the opportunities offered by the university for the students. University employs a concise expression in promoting itself. Inclusive *we* stands for the university. The pronoun *we* refers to an object which works like a heart in a body. In this text, the speaker has been second to none in eulogizing the university. The speaker advertises and praises through the use of inclusive *we*. The advertiser has gone so far as to say that we shall also set new “records of excellence.”

- *We* are the number one choice for local people looking to study at university in Kent. *We* are the number one choice for people in Kent. 54% of local people looking to study at university in Kent applied to Canterbury Christ Church University (based on 2012 UCAS statistics). *We* are one of the South East’s largest providers of training and skills for public services. *We* offer one of the largest numbers of public services courses in the South East. Our teacher training is graded "outstanding" by Ofsted.

In this text from the UK university ‘number one’ has been used again and again only to impress the students. In these sentences the personal pronoun *we* has been used again and again to assert oneself on the students. In the end the speaker claims that even Ofsted has acknowledged their university as outstanding.

- We're different, and we like it that way. William & Mary is unlike any other university in America. We're the second oldest college in the nation, but also a cutting-edge research university. We're highly selective, but also public, offering a world-class education without the sticker shock.

In this text from American university, very high sounding words have been used to attract the students by using *we*. It represents the text producers, a team of writers and editors. The addresser has also created impressive way of familiarity through first person pronoun.

5. Discussions

University makes use of a laconic expression in promoting itself. Online university prospectuses are the primary liaison among the university, students and their parents. They work for advertising and promoting the universities from marketing point of view. In order to advertise and marketize themselves, universities need a multifaceted language that includes the administration, the faculty, the students and the students' parents. In the present situation, the graph of students' enrollment of different universities fluctuates from time to time. The way of addressing the students and presenting the university is most workable. The results reveal that the highest frequency has been counted in the use of first person pronouns. The use of pronoun *we* was found comparatively more than that of *I*. In Indian online prospectuses, the use of first person pronoun *I* and *we* is somewhat equal but in the other four countries, the use of *we* is at the zenith and that of *I* is at the nadir. So far as second person pronoun is concerned, its frequency has been noted high except in American online prospectuses. If we consider every pronoun individually the frequency of *we* and *you* has been recorded at the most. The analysis showed the occurrence of Inclusive *we* for the authority and determination of the university to convey welcoming approaches to the students. The use of *we* reflects encouraging tone, the value of the potential students and sovereignty to revolutionize the whole lot. The usage of *we* transpires the inclusive personal reference. It creates an impressive way of familiarity between the students and the university. the use of *we* and *I* reflects the university's voice while *you* and *your* are used to address the readers directly to create responsiveness in online prospectuses to attract the students.

6. Conclusions

In the changing position of marketing of higher education, the choice and use of linguistic features in prospectus text are becoming more important in promotional strategies milieu. The study was to identify the frequencies of first and second person pronouns in the 'About Us' section from cross-cultural and marketing standpoint. By determining marketing aspects and ideals linked with prospectus, the features of online prospectus with cross-cultural analysis have gained a high degree of importance in the marketing of higher education. In marketing language pronouns contribute to create a cordial atmosphere to induce the addressees. The use of first and second person pronouns signifies sincere and honest promises of the advertiser by creating a harmonious type of liaison between the advertiser and the reader.

The present analysis of this research shows that universities use the features of first person pronouns more frequently than second person pronouns in 'About Us' sections. The qualitative data interpretation of the research reveals that Australian, Pakistani, the UK, and the USA university online prospectuses have used *we* which hints at actions taken by more than one person. In India *I* and *we* are used with almost the same magnitude. The pronoun *we* evokes camaraderie, unison, familiarity and friendship. It encompasses all the readers generally. The occurrence of *I* in the Indian prospectuses is a symbol of self-focus and illustrates responsibility on behalf of speaker and mutual conversation. The feature of *I* renders the text more appropriate and livelier. The first person pronoun *we* have been used at the most in every country. Personal pronouns generate liveliness in writing and make it facile for readers to understand the subject and personalize the writing. They apprise about the interest of the people and launch a sort of nexus between the speaker and the readers.

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